DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 313 HE 013 821

AUTHOR	Chance, William
TITLE	Institutional Reviews by State-Level Agencies: The Evergreen Study.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo. Inservice Education Program.; State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.
SPONS AGENCY	Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.
REPORT NO	IEP-019
PUB DATE	Jul 80
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Advanced Leadership Seminar for State Academic Officers (4th, San Antonio, TX, July 27-30, 1980).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accountability; College Graduates; Educational Assessment; Employer Attitudes; Enrollment; *Experimental Colleges; Government School Relationship; Higher Education; *Institutional Evaluation; *Nontraditional Education; Reputation; *State Agencies; *State Colleges; Student Attitudes; Student Placement; Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS	*Evergreen State College WA; *Seminars for State Leaders Postsec Ed (ECS SHEEO); Washington Postsecondary Education Commission

ABSTRACT

An institutional review of Evergreen State College that was undertaken by the Washington Council for Postsecondary Education is described. A review of a higher education institution by a state agency was unusual but was a compromise action by the 1977 state legislature, which also considered closing the college, whose institutional cost level was high and its enrollment lower than projected. The Council determined that there was potential for enrollment growth, but that it would represent an increase of approximately 90 percent. An examination of Evergreen's accreditation reports revealed that the review committees had consistently given the college high marks. The effectiveness of Evergreen's nontraditional curriculum was assessed through interviewing of current and past students, employers providing internship or cooperative education experiences for Evergreen students, and high school staff and students. Additionally, the college's placement records were compared with those of other institutions in the state. It was found that the college's academic standards were high, students who attended it were tremendously supportive of the institution, employers were quite satisfied with the quality of graduates they had hired, and the placement level of the college was high, but high school students possessed a negative image of the institution, and Evergreen was not doing very much to counteract these impressions. It was concluded that the college had an effective educational program, but that some changes to meet extant student needs were necessary and that marketing strategies had to improve. The 20 recommendations of the Council's report, which included enrollment goals, were positively received by the school, and the Legislature rendered the recommendations into statute law. Improvements have resulted at the college. (SW)

ED202313

Inservice Education Program (IEP)

Paper Presented at a Seminar for State Leaders in Postsecondary Education

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS BY STATE-LEVEL AGENCIES:
THE EVERGREEN STUDY

WILLIAM CHANCE

Deputy Coordinator for Academic Affairs
Washington Council for Postsecondary Education

San Antonio, Texas
July 1980

IEP Paper No. 019

HE 013 821

Education Commission of the States

Inservice Education Program (IEP)
Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

SHEEO

The IEP Program has been supported primarily by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation with additional funds from the Education Commission of the States, the Frost Foundation and the State Higher Education Executive Officers

GENERAL SUBJECT: STATE OF THE ART IN STATE-LEVEL ACADEMIC REVIEWS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS BY STATE-LEVEL AGENCIES: THE EVERGREEN STUDY

A Paper by William Chance for the Fourth Annual
Advanced Leadership Seinar for State Academic Officers:
July 27-30, 1980, San Antonio, Texas

Recently, I heard a story about two not-very-bright hunters, who were looking for Elk in the Washington Cascades. They found what they were looking for and bagged a large bull down in a snowy ravine. With no small struggle, they were dragging it out across the snow by its hind legs. Soon, they came upon another hunter, who stopped to admire the trophy. After several appreciative comments, he said, "I don't want to be telling you how to move an Elk, but if you pull it by its antlers, you'll be dragging it with the grain of the hair, and it will slide much more easily over the snow." The suggestion was logical, so the two hunters began dragging the Elk by its antlers. After a couple of hundred yards, one turned to the other and said, "You know, that guy was right--it is easier to drag this way." The other one replied, "Yeah, but we're sure getting a long way from the truck."

Sometimes it seems that higher education is a lot like that. People often seem to be doing things right, but they aren't getting any closer to the truck.

One of the purposes of these annual seminars for academic officers is to help determine the right directions. A seminar on the State of the Art is an important part of that: Art, in this case, is a term that must be applied loosely.

State-level coordination is developing, moving into new areas, taking an occasional new direction. Attempting to identify where it is going,

however, is a science with approximately the same reliability of enrollment projecting.

I want to talk today about a new area into which my agency, a coordinating board, was recently thrust: Institutional Review--an area heretofore considered sacrosanct by most of the higher education purists. As you know, institutional review traditionally has been the accepted province of the accrediting associations. You also know, however, that there is growing uncertainty among political decision-makers over the role of accreditation. Murmurs can be heard with decreasing faintness--state accreditation, or perhaps a variant of this, licensing (in more than a business permit sense), is a phrase uttered in stage whispers in the restrooms of more than a few state houses throughout the land.

Most of the states are now involved in some form of educational licensing or registration, mainly directed at consumer protection or minimal quality control. Institutional review, at least to some degree, is involved here, frequently consisting of a catalog examination and a review of financial statements. Where all of that is going is hard to determine. But, what I want to talk about is a more-or-less full-fledged institutional examination.

Institutional reputations, like the ripples formed in a quiet lake when the droppings of a careless bird pierce the still surface, tend to increase with distance from the event. Such was the case with The Evergreen State College. Nationally respected as a successful, innovative, state-supported institution, with advertisements in Rolling Stone, Evergreen's image at home was sullied by impressions of permissiveness, laxity, and intellectual, if not political, liberalism. Shaggy-haired students, bearded faculty, and Bargain Days for Greener Sales at the local Salvation Army

outlet did not improve the situation; nor did the fact that enrollments at the institution were not increasing to projected levels, a situation which, since the physical plant had been built, contributed to a unit instructional cost level that was about twice that of Evergreen's sister institutions.

Some members of the State Legislature were raising questions about Evergreen as early as two months after it opened in 1971. During the ensuing six years, additional members joined the coalition. It was not until 1976, however, that a catalyst was added: It occurred when the first President completed his planned tour of duty and stepped down to join the faculty. The trustees appointed to the position of President the outgoing Governor of the state, a highly competent person who had served twelve years in that post. Evergreen, as an issue, was in danger of politization. The fact that the trustees of several state institutions had awarded then outgoing presidents with paid sabbaticals heightened the tension.

During the 1977 Legislative Session, there were several bills or proposals considered. Some would have closed the College; others would have converted it to state office space; still another would have made it a branch campus of the University of Washington (a prospect that generated no small amount of apprehension among the faculty of that institution).

The issue was debated at considerable length, and a familiar compromise was reached--the Council for Postsecondary Education would be directed to undertake a study of the College and report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature at its next regular session. The Legislature also directed that no more than $25,000 of the Council's appropriated funds be allocated to the study. This had two effects: for the Council it meant that expenditures would have to be watched closely, since this would be a consideration in subsequent audits; for supporters of Evergreen it was believed that $25,000 could be more effectively spent elsewhere. This latter

group also believed the Council had been appropriated $25,000 for the study. That was not the case, since the amount applied to otherwise appropriated funds.

In any case, the Council received the assignment much in the manner of one who is handed the leash to a not-fully-socialized dragon. It recognized the issue as a highly political one, but it also knew the future of the College was involved. It was clear from the beginning that the only plausible direction to follow was one in which maximal objectivity would be sought. The ensuing methodology was based on this principle.

The legislative directive required the Council to address two questions, specifically, although the study was not to be limited to these two. The first was, "the actions necessary to broaden the institution's clientele base by introducing traditional graduate and undergraduate course offerings." The second was, "the actions necessary to reduce the institution's operating costs per FTE student to the average cost-per-FTE student at the other three state colleges."

Both were related, at least conceptually, since it was generally believed Evergreen's nontraditional approach to education was having the effect of discouraging potential students. The most obvious way to bring the cost down was to bring the enrollments up. Hence, the conventional theory seemed to be that if Evergreen could be forced to return to a more traditional mode, the enrollments would increase.

Evergreen's early decision to embark on nontraditional studies provides an interesting insight into how decisions are sometimes made in higher education. The decision to establish the school was made in 1966, in the context of the enrollment pressures generally affecting higher education (a simultaneous decision to establish a community college system, 27 institutions

in Washington, was similarly related to these enrollment pressures). This was before the days of the Council, and consultants were brought in to plan for the college. Enrollment projections were high, with 12,000 students by 1985 representing the apogee. (In comparison, Evergreen's 1980 enrollment is approximately 2,500.) The capital construction plans were based on an enrollment level of about 8,500 by 1980. The consulting firm surveyed students, employers, and other groups with respect to determining the kinds of programs Evergreen should offer. It concluded that several specific undergraduate and graduate programs should be provided, most leading to professional credentialism.

Little attention during these early planning phases was directed to the offering of a nontraditional curriculum. On the contrary, the planning reports spoke almost entirely of traditional-type programs. It was not until the ground-breaking ceremony that the subject surfaced. During one of the speeches, a dignitary mentioned the idea. The speech fell on receptive ears, and the College had its mandate to establish a nontraditional curriculum. Academic planning thereafter proceeded from that concept. Subsequent discussions with faculty and others during the course of the Council study invariably referred to the "legislative mandate" the College had been given. Much of the faculty frustration with the Legislature's inquiries were related, then, to a belief the College was being criticized for what the Legislature had told it to do. This unfortunate conception of reality, however, was not accurate.

The Council began its study with a review of all of the major documents, press articles, etc. it could obtain to understand more fully the events that gave rise to the College's existence, its curricular mode, and its enrollment problems. The overly optimistic enrollment projections, which

had become the major basis for Evergreen's capital plant, were mentioned earlier. This part of the report was especially interesting, in that it allowed for a certain straightening of the record. The Council then conducted a demographic analysis of the College's service region and found, expectedly, that the participation rate was the lowest of any region in the state. It also was able to determine, however, that if Evergreen were to attain a service level for its region, comparable to that of Eastern Washington University, which served a region generally comparable in terms of the demographics, it could double the enrollment level necessary for it to reach the magic average cost point. On this basis the Council was able to determine that the potential for growth to optimal levels existed.

With respect to the "break-even" enrollment level, Evergreen would have to reach an enrollment level of approximately 4000 FTE students. This would represent an increase of approximately 90 percent. With this figure established, the goal became one of deciding how to reach it.

Evergreen's instructional format can be described only as nontraditional, an unfortunate word, but one with more bearable connotations than "unconventional." It was important that those reading the final report understood as accurately as possible what that curriculum comprised. It was necessary, therefore, that it be described in layman's terms. The translation comprised one full chapter of the report. During this review, the Council also examined and summarized Evergreen's accreditation reports, noting that the review committees had consistently given the College high marks.

The study then turned to an examination of the effectiveness of the Evergreen program, and at this point the Council relied heavily upon survey research. The staff interviewed students, current and past; surveyed still

other students by mailed questionnaire, attaining a very high return rate; and interviewed and surveyed employers of Evergreen graduates, literally all that could be identified from the placement records of the faculty. It also interviewed employers providing internship, or cooperative education, experiences for students at the college. High school classrooms were visited, with the cooperation of the schools, and nearly 1,500 graduating seniors were polled on their college plans, with particular questions directed to determining why they chose, or did not choose, Evergreen. The staff also interviewed high school principals, counselors, and teachers on the subject of the College. Lastly, it compared Evergreen placement records with those of the other instititions in the state and, incidentally, determined that the College scored very high in this area, with a large number of placements among graduating seniors, a large percentage going on to graduate school, and an impressive number admitted to medical school.

From all of these data the Council was able to determine (a) the College's academic standards were high, and the students who went there were tremendously supportive of the institution; (b) the employers were quite satisfied with the quality of those graduates they had hired; (c) high school students possessed a negative image of the institution, considering it academically weak and inhabited by strange and only marginally appealing people; and (d) the College was not doing very much to counteract these impressions by visiting the high schools, preparing brochures, and, most of all, issuing a catalog that could be understood by people whose major interests did not encompass poetry.

Before describing the final task, one should mention that the Council found enormous agreement among the college students who were interviewed on the steps that needed to be taken, particularly with respect to the

curriculum, to improve it. Surprisingly, these suggestions were also in general accord with the opinions of many who were not directly associated with the College.

In view of Evergreen's nontraditional curriculum, the final task was to make some determination of the status of this educational form in the United States. Fortunately, Gerald Grant and David Riesman had just completed an impressive book on the subject, and both authors were receptive to lengthy telephone interviews. Both also were familiar with the College, in that it had been part of their original plan to include a chapter on it in their book. Their suggestions were edifying and helpful. As part of this portion of the report, the staff also surveyed other institutions established about the same time as Evergreen. It found that several which had begun as nontraditional institutions had reoriented their programs and attained enrollment growth.

Obviously, the findings of the study were more expansive than those discussed here. In any case, at the end the staff was forced to conclude that closure of the institution would work hardships. It and the Council also rejected the idea of the dual curriculum, because of the devisive nature such an approach would have on the institution and the students. The results of the study argued convincingly that Evergreen had an effective educational program, but that some changes to meet extant student needs were necessary. Moreover, the College had to improve its record with respect to getting its message across. The twenty recommendations of the report outlined detailed suggestions for accomplishing these goals; they also established enrollment goals, to which the College would commit, and for which the Legislature would agree to provide funding under the state's enrollment contract system. The College also was required to submit annual reports,

through the Council to the Legislature on the steps it was taking to implement the recommendations.

After the report was discussed in detail with faculty and others at Evergreen, discussions that were highly constructive, with the Evergreen Community displaying a great deal of positive responsiveness to the report, it was adopted by the Council and forwarded to the Legislature. Then, surprizingly, the Legislature accepted the report and proceeded to render the recommendations into statute law.

Conditions appear to be improving for the College. It has implemented most of the recommendations, and it plans to implement others. Enrollments have increased, curricular changes have been made, marketing strategies have been established, and so on.

The question is: What does all of this mean? From one perspective it demonstrates the potential of a state-level agency, in this case a coordinating board, to serve as an intermediary and develop a report that will be considered objective by both major parties--the institution and the Legislature. The report was not a white-wash of the College, but it did fairly represent its achievements. There was no other easy way the College could get the message across. Because the report accomplished this, at least in some measure, it was accepted constructively by the institution.

The report also demonstrates some capacity among non-institutional entities to appreciate and relate effectively to a number of areas, including curricular matters, that faculty and institutional administrators have traditionally considered their sole province. There appears to be only one other major instance in which a state agency conducted a comprehensive review of an institution--that was in Minnesota. In both cases the institutions were threatened with closure, and the reports were instrumental both in keeping them viable and identifying remedies that could assure a

longer life.

Whether other states and agencies become involved in such analyses remains to be seen. Certainly, if present enrollment projections become realities, other schools will be faced with extinction. In such an event Legislatures may turn to the state agency for help and advice. When this happens, the directors of these agencies should know that it has been done elsewhere, and there are some precedents that can be followed.